PROSPECT,

OR

View of the Moral World,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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Comments on the sacred writings of the Jews and Christians: Genesis, Chapter the 6th.

THE incoherency, discordance, and want of connection, so often presented in these sacred pages, ought to convince every candid mind that they have no just claim to the character of truth, to divine inspiration, perspicuity of composition, or utility of influence, either in morals or philosophy. This chapter in its commencement presents us with three different kinds of characters: The sons of God, the daughters of men and giants. Who these sons of God were we are not specially informed; whether they were a celestial race of beings, of an extraordinary size, and sent down from the upper regions for the purpose of paying their respects to the female beauties of this terrestrial world, or whether they were of earthly origin, and the peculiar favorites of the most high—whether after they had taken to themselves wives of the daughters of men, this procreative operation produced these giants, or whether the giants sprang from some other source—on all these points we are left in a state of total ignorance, and the very manner in which the ideas and the composition are put together, proves that it was done by some body who possessed neither the spirit of God nor the spirit of reason to guide him in his labours. Another point of importance which calls for attention in this chapter, is that which exhibits a most destructive abandonment of the exalted character of God, and consigns the care of the universe to a being as changeable and as imperfect as man himself. For it is here said (Verse 5), that God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every

imagination of the thoughts of his heart, was only evil continually. Verse 6, and it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.—Here the omniscience of God is indirectly called in question by saying that he saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, which seems to imply that he was not apprized of this result at the time of creation. His immutability, another essential attribute of the creator, is here completely destroyed. Can any one believe that an all perfect being can repent? Will any christian believer affirm that the munificent ruler of nature, who holds in his hands the destinies of universal existence, could really repent—could be grieved at his heart for his former conduct? The admission of such an idea would effectually destroy the infinity of divine perfections and reduce the character of Jehovah to a level with feeble and imperfect man. These Jewish writers, this chosen people so highly favored by heaven, were surely as ignorant of the principles of true theism, as any of the most savage nations upon the face of the earth. If they worshipped but one God, he however was so vicious, imperfect, cruel, ferocious, and vindictive in his character, that they would have been better without any, and the bloody murders which the Jews committed under the sanction of authority, declared to be divine, would never have stained the annals of human history. The remaining part of this chapter is taken up in stating that disgust which God seems to have exhibited in regard to his own works, for he says that the earth was filled with violence, and that all flesh had corrupted his way—that the whole scheme from beginning to end was wrong, that he had been disappointed in his prospects, and that a redress of grievences must be had some way—a flood or universal deluge was considered as the best method of gratifying divine indignation—of removing the errors of former and imperfect designs. This deluge presumed by christian theology to be a fact is so important an item in the discussion of christianity that it will be necessary to make it a subject of some future comments. Noah's ship and voyage were curious and singular circumstances, not easily reconciled to the laws of nature—to the character of God, or the general experience of mankind. The deluge is a whale of a story, and we shall look to it in our next number.

THE universe is a grand and impressive exhibition of divine wisdom; it is an undying testimony in favor of God's existence; but ancient theology, especially that which is denominated christian, is a distortion of all the laws of nature —it goes upon the idea of breaking and patching up,—always mending, and the thing is no better after all. The principles by which the world is governed, are correct and uniform in their operations—they stand forth full of argument against christian calumnies, and mahometan impudence. If the law of nature (says Volney,) be sufficient, why did God give us another—If it be insufficient why did he give us that! Let christians answer this dilemma if they can, if not they had better relinquish that scheme of religion which comports neither with reason, the laws of nature, nor the character of God.

The following piece, obligingly communicated by Mr. Paine, for the Prospect, is full of that acuteness of mind, perspicuity of expression, and clearness of discernment, for which this excellent author is so remarkable in all his writings.

ROBERT HALL,

A protestant minister in England, preached and published a sermon against what he calls "*Modern Infidelity.*" A copy of it was sent to a gentleman in America, with a request for his opinion thereon. That gentleman sent it to a friend of his in New-York, with the request written on the cover—and this last sent it to Thomas Paine, who wrote the following observations on the blank leaf at the end of the Sermon.

REMARKS ON THE FOREGOING SERMON.

THE preacher of the foregoing sermon speaks a great deal about *infidelity*, but does not define what he means by it. His harangue is a general exclamation. Every thing, I suppose, that is not in his creed is infidelity with him, and his creed is infidelity with me. Infidelity is believing falsely. If what christians believe is not true, it is the christians that are the infidels.

The point between deists and christians is not about doctrine, but about fact—for if the things believed by the christians to be facts, are not facts, the doctrine founded thereon falls of itself. There is such a book as the bible, but is it a fact that the bible is *revealed religion?* The christians cannot prove it is. They put tradition in place of evidence, and tradition is not proof. If it were, the reality of witches could be proved by the same kind of evidence.

The bible is a history of the times of which it speaks, and history is not revelation. The obscene and vulgar stories in the bible are as repugnant to our ideas of the purity of a divine Being, as the horrid cruelties and murders it ascribes to him, are repugnant to our ideas of his justice. It is the reverence of the *Deists* for the attributes of the DEITY, that causes them to reject the bible.

Is the account which the christian church gives of the person called Jesus Christ, a fact or a fable? Is it a fact that he was begotten by the holy Ghost? The christians cannot prove it, for the case does not admit of proof. The things called miracles in the bible, such, for instance as raising the dead, admitted, *if true*, of occular demonstration, but the story of the conception of Jesus Christ in the womb is a case beyond miracle, for it did not admit of demonstration. Mary, the reputed mother of Jesus, who must be supposed to know best, never said so herself, and all the evidence of it is, that the book of Mathew says, that Joseph dreamed an angel told him so. Had an old maid of two or three hundred years of age, brought forth a child, it would have been much better presumptive evidence of a supernatural conception, than Mathew's story of Joseph's dream about his young wife.

Is it a fact that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world, and how is it proved? If a God he could not die, and as a man he could not redeem, how then is this redemption proved to be fact? It is said that Adam eat of the forbidden fruit, commonly called an apple, and thereby subjected himself and all his posterity for ever to eternal damnation.—This is worse than visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the *third and fourth generations*. But how was the death of Jesus Christ to affect or alter the case?—Did God thirst for blood? If so, would it not have been better to have crucified Adam at once upon the forbidden tree, and made a new man? Would not this have been more cre-

ator like than repairing the old one? Or, did God, when he made Adam, supposing the story to be true, exclude himself from the right of making another? Or impose on himself the necessity of breeding from the old stock? Priests should first prove facts and deduce doctrines from them afterwards. But instead of this, they assume every thing and prove nothing. Authorities drawn from the bible are no more than authorities drawn from other books, unless it can be proved that the bible is revelation.

This story of the redemption will not stand examination. That man should redeem himself from the sin of eating an apple, by committing a murder on Jesus Christ, is the strangest system of religion ever set up. Deism is perfect purity compared with this. It is an established principle with the quakers not to shed blood—suppose then all Jerusalem had been quakers when Christ lived, there would have been nobody to crucify him, and in that case, if man is redeemed by his blood, which is the belief of the church, there could have been no redemption—and the people of Jerusalem must all have been damned, because they were too good to commit murder. The christian system of religion is an outrage on common sense. Why is man afraid to think?

Why do not the christians, to be consistent, make saints of Judas and Pontius Pilate, for they were the persons who accomplished the act of salvation. The merit of a sacrifice, if there can be any merit in it, was never in the thing sacrificed, but in the persons offering up the sacrifice—and therefore Judas and Pontius Pilate ought to stand first on the calender of saints.

THOMAS PAINE.

CHRISTIAN CONTRADICTIONS.

ONE *Faustus*, a *Manichean*, writes concerning the Gospels "that they were wrote a long time after the apostles by certain obscure persons, who lest no credit should be given to the stories they told, of what they could not know, prefixed to their writings the names of the apostles, which are so full of mistakes, of contradictory relations and opinions, that they are neither coherent with themselves, nor consistent with one another."

And a little after he accuses his adversaries whom power had made orthodox, thus, "Many things were foisted by "your ancestors into the scriptures of our Lord, which, tho' "marked with his name, agree not with his faith. And no "wonder since we have frequently proved these things were "neither written by himself, nor his apostles; but several "matters after their decease were picked up from stories "and flying reports, by I know not what set of half Jews, "and these not agreeing among themselves, who nevertheless publishing them under the names of the apostles of "our Lord, or of those that succeeded them, have feigned "their own lies and errors to be written according to them." Celsus exclaims against the too great liberty which the christians took, as if they were drunk, or altering their original gospel several times, that so they might retract and deny those matters which had been urged against them.

All the authority we can give of the authenticity of the christian traditioners is from the fathers—and of their understanding it is certain, they judged of what was right or wrong, as it suited with, or was opposite to their party; "each espousing those scriptures as canonical, in which their "peculiar tenets were to be found—the rest they termed Apo-"cryphal, or deutrocanonnical." As for the testimony of the fathers, "all know who are ever so little acquainted with "their writings, that they are not to be credited in the revelation, scarce of any one single matter of fact, for the many "negligences, impertinences and falshoods that are found in "them—eat up as they were with the grossest superstitions."

Papias, the tutor of Irenæus, was (as Eusebius says) a man of weak judgment and a fabulous author, and one who led many into error, and particularly his pupil Irenæus a simple and credulous man, who is the first ecclesiastical writer of note. No wonder the followers of an erroneous guide are led into errors.

To be particular about the fathers, their ambition, insolence, avarice, ignorance, faction, sedition, persecution of each other, cruelty, murders, lies and forgeries, and other flagrant vices would be endless; yet these are the men whose honesty we are to depend upon for conveying to us the oracles of truth. "Are we to learn our religion from those who wanted charity. "Or our charity and meekness? From men who were perpe-"tually quarrelling with and cursing each other? No people "upon earth ever differed more, nor proceeded with greater "fury and bitterness in their differences. They were con-

" stantly quarrelling about the smallest as well as the greatest " points—and for the smallest as well as the greatest they " damned one another.—Does their feigning villains and as- " sassins, as sometimes they did, entitle them to the charac- " ter and reverence of saints? Does their eternal contention " qualify them for the center of unity? Is their turbu- " lant spirit and their wild want of common sense, their " ravenous avarice, and flaming ambition, their fury and " fighting, their frequent change of opinion, their apostacy " and murders—are all these, or any of them proper Guides " of God's holy people? And that these marks belong to " many of the fathers, and all of them to some, is too mani- " fest." Another author observes, " that the fathers too, in " almost all traditions, follow one another, like so many " geese in a train, having neither the honesty nor abilities to " look carefully into things, or to consider the nature of " that evidence by which only they ought to have been go- " verned in relation to sacred things."——" In a word, " a man might fill volumes with the bare recital only, and " that from the very best authorities, of the impieties and " senseless vanities of the fathers—but indeed ecclesiastical " history has done it already to our hands, being itself but a " compendium of their vices.

" Though 'tis fit we should give our assent sometimes to " truths, upon the bare testimony of others, yet this assent " will be stronger or weaker as the testimony is more or less " reasonable.——Testimony, before it can become the ob- " ject of a reasonable assent. must be attended with these " two circumstances, credibility of persons, and credibility " of things; for by these we are to judge of all history.— " For instance, if what is related as fact, be agreeable to rea- " son and experience, and we know the relators to be men " of good sense and great fidelity, then we have the highest " external evidence of the truth. But if we have the rela- " tion of a fact supposed to have been done hundreds of years " before our time, and cannot come at the characters of the " first relators, the evidence is very much decreased—but " if the characters of the intermediate relators are well " known, and we have reason to believe from their composi- " ons, or otherwise, that they were both weak and enthusiasti- " cal, self-interested and designing knaves, easily impose(" on themselves, and disposed to deceive others, then the " relation deserves no credit. And such a set of men I take " the fathers of heads of parties to have been, almost to a

" man, during the four first centuries, and sometime after, " injudicious in all they relate, taken up with every idle re- " port, unfaithful, ignorant of true religion, bigots, knavish " in all favorite points of divinity, silly reasoners, betrayers " of true christianity, platonists. This all men see or may " see, if they will acquaint themselves with their writings— " and that instead of establishing holy scripture with their " testimonies, they have rendered it the most precarious " thing in the world." Therefore the truth of sacred writings must be sought for by their own internal evidence.

A POLITICAL LECTURE

Will be delivered by the Editor of this paper, on Tuesday evening next, at 7 o'clock, at Shepherd's Long-Room, Druid's grove Tavern, No. 11, George-street.

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